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FOURTH ROUND OR PEACE IN VIETNAM?

ELEVEN FALLACIES AND ONE "HONORABLE" SOLUTION

Attrition

Konrad Kellen

Military Tactics? } Not really tried or pushed (so not effective fallacies)
 Diplomatic Strategy? }
 Diplomacy/Politics }
 Fallacies }

15 April 1968

Outside Support Cutred - Dally

- Facing Out Fallacy
- Analogies: Korea, Berlin, Munich
- Other War F. ()
- The "Alternative Nationalists" F.
- The "National Unio" F.
- The "Stability" Fallacy

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- US is not Freeee
 - US can Learn Anythg - in true - (and less so) is most Powerful Nation

Introductory Note: A friend and colleague to whom I showed this paper in ms form, criticized me for "calling fallacies practically all thinking that has been done on Vietnam" and thus "setting myself up as the only person able to think on the subject." Naturally, nothing could be further from my mind. I encountered difficulties, however, when I tried to eliminate the rather hard word, fallacies. In fact, the more I thought about it, the more it appeared to me that almost all past thinking on the war has indeed been fallacious, a notion that seems confirmed by the fact that such great exertions by such a great power led to such striking failures.

Of course, some of the "fallacies" traced in this paper did not arise with Vietnam, nor are they limited to Vietnam. Rather, they were part of our thinking before, and only became crystallized there. Nor are they necessarily all fallacies in the sense that the thinking contained in them is so basically wrong as to be altogether inapplicable in any situation or to any degree, though some of the fallacies enumerated here seem to be basic, while other trains of accustomed thought may only have become fallacies by virtue of their application in this case. What appears, then, is that some perfectly logical assumptions may have been reduced ad absurdum in Vietnam --

others may have been absurd to begin with. And all did, and still do, transcend Vietnam.

The following thoughts which occurred to the writer in the course of much reading and talking on the subject of the war in Vietnam, were put down on paper before President Johnson's speech of March 31, and the events that followed. They are nevertheless issued herewith on a limited basis as they may be useful (a) in case the war should revert to previous patterns, and (b) as an input to "lessons learned" -- an endeavor that cannot be started too early, or pursued too vigorously. The observations themselves represent in many instances the ultimate results of preceding thought processes, and may therefore appear apodictic and extreme to some readers, as well as "unsubstantiated." In any event, these are not what one would call analysis in the strict sense, but are personal conclusions. -- THIS PAPER IS NOT PART OF ANY ONGOING PROJECT AT RAND.

* * *

The United States thought its way into this war; it should also be able to think its way out of this war again.

The United States, I say, thought its way into this war, as after all, it was not physically assaulted. It

entered into the contest with Hanoi and the NLF (which, not unlike Castro in 1961, commanded the allegiance of a substantial portion of the local population) for a variety of interconnected reasons: to contain Communism in general and Red Chinese influence in particular; to come to the aid of a "free nation" and quasi-ally; to oppose "aggression." Whether right or wrong, all these were thoughts and theories, which is why I say the United States "thought its way" into this war.

If the United States wants to think its way out of this war again, it cannot simply focus on the situation as it was when we entered the contest. For in the course of the engagement -- there actually were, as I shall try to demonstrate below, three discrete engagements, all of which we lost -- things have changed drastically, and a new note was added which has come to overshadow all the others by far: American face. Where, in the beginning, it was a question of "saving" South Vietnam, the principal question is now one of saving America's face, and that face has many facets: American power, wisdom, reliability as an ally, and so on; and many sub-faces, such as the correctness of American political and military theories.

When we say that this new element -- American face -- has come to dominate all the other concerns which precipitated the conflict in the first place, we do not mean to say that it has replaced them -- far from it. The other concerns, due to our very bloody and costly failures in Vietnam, have greatly increased in their own turn: Most of us seem to feel that all the dire calamities we envisaged at the outset, such as the expansion of "Communism," the swamping of South Vietnam, and all the attendant spectres that we conjured up with the power of our thought, will be infinitely more dire if the effort should fail now. And our concern over these spectres is further intensified by our exasperation with our failures.

But the United States -- though pilloried in Vietnam by a relentless and resourceful foe of embarrassingly small proportions -- is after all still the most powerful, secure and rich country on earth; therefore, as long as it has not been physically assaulted it must by definition be able to think its way out again of all its self-generated predicaments which both led to this war, were in turn enormously inflated by it, and now impede its termination.

But how to go about it? What must we do now in Vietnam? This perennial question can never help us. In fact, the very question leads directly to the worst of all possible choices: heedless activism. In order to think its way out of the carnage; in order to think its way out of the Alice-in-Wonderland indicators of our progress and "their" defeats; in order to think its way out of the depressing act of nation-destroying which we, in true Orwellian fashion, call "nation-building"; in order to put an end to this "flight forward," as an eminent psychiatrist has called such behavior on the part of severely self-destructive patients;* in order to do all these things, the U.S. must not ask, over and over again: "What should we do now?", but instead: "What is the situation?"

This first and crucial step is of course easier advocated than taken, for the war in Vietnam has become a national obsession which, like any other obsession, tends to foreclose thought and, in fact, make people hostile to thought. The reason is that for most of those

* George Kennan has said: "(We) ... have pushed stubbornly and heedlessly ahead, like men in a dream, seemingly insensitive to outside opinion, seemingly unable to arrive at any realistic assessment of the effects of (our) acts." Introducing McCarthy, Newark, February 29, 1968.

of us who have contributed, however slightly or indirectly, to the melancholy course of events and the present vexing impasse, the influx of new thought represents a challenge not only to past commitments, but also to cherished opinions, theories, positions, ideologies and methodologies.

But what is the situation? The situation, first of all, is not really very complex -- that is just one of those odious obfuscations that are part of this war and keep prolonging it. In all respects, the situation is rather simple. We are not in a "six-sided box."

To begin with, we are at present^{*} at the threshold of the fourth stage or round of the politico-military engagement in Vietnam. The first was Eisenhower's (and his predecessors') initial involvement which ended in failure in 1963, with the assassination of Diem and the coups that followed. The second was Kennedy's round which ended, after his death, also in failure, in the spring of 1965, when the South Vietnamese government and armed forces were disintegrating, and the U.S. "had to" send massive armed forces to come to their assistance.

ignorant

* Unless current termination efforts are carried through, which is very far from certain.

The third was Johnson's round which has now equally ended in failure in the Tet offensive a few weeks ago.* It is immaterial, in this connection, how observers will evaluate the eventual effects of the Tet offensive. The mere fact that it "forced us" to act as we did, and now leaves us perplexed and inactive amid the terrible devastation and a VC-dominated countryside where we are back where we started from, is sufficient proof that the third round is finished and lost.

The situation is, further, that on our side efforts are now being made to prepare for and enter into the fourth round.** It is true that there is no consensus on just how to fight it, and the call for alternate strategies can be heard throughout the land both from the cognoscenti and the hoi polloi. But there seems to be consensus that a fourth round must now somehow be waged, albeit with "alternate strategies," except for those few who have concluded that the war must now be ended

* Has the war, as some claim, now been "lost"? The war has obviously not been lost, as our capability to fight on is unimpaired. But, so far all its campaigns have been lost.

** Even after the President's speech, a fourth round seems to be at least in preparation.

even by unilateral disengagement, if necessary.

This, then, is the situation at home. But what is it in Vietnam? The situation in Vietnam, the "options" there open to us, are best sketched out in negative, with the help of eleven principal fallacies which individually or in consonance are obscuring the realities we are facing there.

1. The "Escalation" Fallacy. Not too much needs to be said here, perhaps, about this unfortunate train of thought based on the assumption that various forms of extending and intensifying the war will "knock them out," "force them to the table," and so on, as it seems not favored at the moment. But one disturbing aspect of the escalation fallacy deserves mention: it is that on one level escalation is, theoretically at least, not altogether a fallacy, from which aspect its great fascination derives. It might be possible -- if the rest of the world holds still -- by unleashing so far unused military capabilities, to bring the war to an end by killing a million or two Vietnamese in the North and the South, while devastating their land for a long time to come, and thus effect the disintegration of their "forces." This form of termina-

tion by ex-termination -- the "Stone Age" solution not only for the North but also for the South -- may well be within our military capabilities. It is not very likely, however, that the world would hold still either during or after such actions, nor that this kind of termination could have anything but the political results, both inside and outside of Vietnam, that are the exact opposite of what we set out to do. Besides, it would alter the very character of the United States itself -- to the extent that the war as now conducted has not already begun to alter that character in a most undesirable way. In any event, further escalation cannot be separated from destruction of the country and its people; and the idea of weaning the people away from the VC and attaining positive political ends while raising the level of violence, destruction, and disruption still further above the very high level it already had reached, cannot be seriously entertained within any responsible effort to think one's way out of Vietnam.

2. The "De-escalation" Fallacy. Much more serious and worthy of thought is the de-escalation, or dove,^{*}

* "Dove" in the context of this paper, refers to the position of those who want to scale down violence or objectives but want to continue the "effort."

fallacy. The de-escalator, being generally a victim of the "Pacification" Fallacy of which more below, is a believer in limited, controlled war in which he can set, and maintain, the level of violence that suits him, as well as the degree of offensiveness or defensiveness of military operations designed to support his efforts at nation-building. But the hard fact is that de-escalation for the purposes of what appears to the other side as "neo-colonialist" activities in the towns and country-side of Vietnam runs precisely counter to VC interests; and the second equally hard fact is that the VC have the capability, and retain the capability, to deny the dove the de-escalation he seeks in order to do in the country what the VC does not want him to do. As a result, attempts at de-escalation in Vietnam are condemned to lead as inexorably to ever higher levels of violence as planned escalation does. If anything has proven this point it is the fact that U.S. strategy -- which is actually one of "restraint" -- has led to the totally undesired but "inevitable" mass killing of people* and the devastation

* Though the figures are vague, it is estimated that our efforts in Vietnam have so far killed and seriously wounded over one million people.

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of their country, their cities and even their farm land. Any attempts at de-escalation (while "Pacification" is continued) can only encourage the VC to "take advantage" and hit us even harder, thus provoking new increases in the level of violence.

3. The "Pacification" Fallacy. The pacification fallacy is perhaps the most deeply ingrained and therefore the most pernicious of all. It corresponds to an entire array of American dreams -- to do something "worthwhile," be a good Boy Scout, a Christian, a Mr. Bountiful. But the idea of pacification is based on the great empathy failure from which most men suffer, and particularly citizens of very large and powerful nations who seem to have no way, either intuitively or by the most advanced method of research, to put themselves into the shoes of their targets. We think in terms of fertilizer and wells, but the Vietnamese think -- as we should know only too well from the mass of interviews we have -- of being left alone by outsiders. There is a complete communication failure at work here, from which the VC do not suffer. Of course, we try to pacify with native teams, in the hope of seeming native and "beating the other fellow at his own game." But these native cohorts whom the VC call

lackeys and mercenaries -- and who are indeed mostly lackeys and mercenaries -- just do not have the spark, and no amount of effort or ingenuity can instill it in them. The principal reason for that is that the VC work for Vietnam (whatever shape they wish to give it), while the GVN works for us. To this we say, of course, that we have only Vietnam's best interests at heart and will leave when things are settled in Vietnam "the way we want them." But, in the first place, the Vietnamese may not want things the way we want them; in the second place it emerges clearly from our interviews that the Vietnamese refuse to believe that people come 6,000 miles and suffer over 100,000 casualties just to help them; and, finally, in view of the nightmarish aspect our nation-building dream assumes in reality most of those cooperating with us cannot possibly respect themselves even if they are bona fide anti-Communists, but can only be mercenaries, which is why they lack the spark. But aside from the fact that Pacification is impossible because our Pacification aims and methods are unacceptable to the people in the Vietnamese countryside, there is another aspect to this which makes Pacification a doubly impossible aim: the choice of Americans entrusted with it. The American dis-

trict adviser who tells the New York Times correspondent over a Scotch and soda that "at last I'm doing something worthwhile now -- this sure is better than to run a couple of gas stations stateside" is probably precisely the man who should be running a couple of gas stations at home, and not be let loose on foreign populations.

(One need only to have attended Charlie Wolf's week-long meeting of AID and Army representatives in the spring of 1966 at RAND to know that all these men, despite their great goodwill, and ample knowledge of local detail, can never do anything but confuse and antagonize any foreign population, and disorganize, if not destroy, its social fabric.* And there are no other men to do the job, which cannot be done in the first place.)

4. The "Security" Fallacy. There are two sets of aspects to security: the long-term vs. the short-term aspect, and the physical vs. the psychological aspect. A man who has a whole armored regiment to guard him may well be and feel quite secure in the short run, but is not necessarily so in the long run. Besides he may not

* See Charles Wolf, Jr., A Symposium on Province Operations in South Vietnam, June 13-17, 1968 (U), The RAND Corporation, RM-5190-ISA, December 1966 (Confidential).

feel, or be, secure even in the short run, as there may be "others" in that regiment, and it is clear from RAND interviews and other sources that the villagers in Vietnam do not feel secure, no matter where they are or how numerous their protectors. They would be foolish if they did, particularly after the Tet offensive, and one thing Vietnamese villagers are not, from all the evidence we have, is foolish. Both in theory and in practice, nobody in Vietnam who cooperates in our programs is secure unless and until final victory over the VC were won, and not even then. Thus, if pacification requires anterior security, it is an impossibility for that reason alone, in addition to all the other reasons mentioned above in the section called the "Pacification" Fallacy.

5. The "Beef-Up the GVN" Fallacy. This is the "nation-building" syndrome based on unconscious American dreams and compulsions to shape others as we wish; it is of course closely connected with the "Pacification" Fallacy. The latest victim of this fallacy is Robert Kennedy who propounded the old thesis when in his announcement of 16 March that he would run, he asked that the 18 and 19 year olds in Vietnam had to be drafted, corruption

be stamped out in Saigon, and so on.* But when John Vann reports that he had personally, as a result of indefatigable efforts, managed to have 75 GVN officials removed for corruption, only to find all of them reinstated within six months in equal or better jobs, it should become clear that corruption is "built-in." And if the New York Times ** reports that two officials who had been fired for corruption were soon reinstated because their American friends and protectors (on the colonel level) insisted that these men "got things done," it should become even clearer. To press the 18 and 19 year olds into service would obviously only mean more carnage; to stamp out corruption in Saigon is clearly impossible, considering the kind of people the GVN consists of and the kind of system they live under. It is symptom, not cause. And nothing can be improved in that respect anyway as it is not possible to mobilize men of integrity and ability; RAND consultant Vu Van Tai reports that the information media in Saigon are on an "infinitely lower level than those in Hanoi," and that

* Although he is right when he says: "Are we like the God of the Old Testament that we can decide, in Washington, D.C., what cities, what towns, what hamlets in Vietnam are going to be destroyed?" Senate Debate, March 8, 1968.

** January 12, 1968.

most of those who can think and write in South Vietnam are abstaining, and living in a sort of inner immigration. The reason for that (aside from incurable lack of free speech in the GVN) is that these men undoubtedly disagree with the United States' methods and even its aims, and refuse to be what in their minds would be Quislings. But all these and many other factors are not the principal reason why the GVN can never be "beefed-up." The central reason resides in the following irreducible paradox: no GVN that is not genuinely popular can be effective in the pursuit of the war, and no GVN that favors the war can be genuinely popular with the war-weary population. For this reason alone the idea of turning what is our puppet government and assembly in Saigon, into a "real" and effective government is a fallacy. (Of course, a "transfer" of the war's burden to the GVN can be used as a step in liquidating the involvement, but it cannot but lead to failure, and probably renewed U.S. involvement, if taken at face value.)

6. The "Winning the Hearts and Minds" Fallacy. This fallacy is in turn closely related to the "Pacification" and "Beef-Up the GVN" fallacies, but deserves a few separate words of comment nevertheless, even though the --

quixotic -- term is now less frequently used. Aside from all the other reasons already stated why we can never win the hearts and minds of the Vietnamese people, there is the -- to us not easily apparent -- Jekyll and Hyde image we are continuously projecting. All armies are brutal, but the American army is both brutal and crushingly kind, which is -- as we know from interviews -- altogether confusing and unsettling to those who become victims of both its brutality and its kindness. To the Vietnamese, the Americans are people who bring in countless tons of food and destroy, at the same time, countless tons of food; who shower children with candy and even carry them to hospitals through machine gun fire, and, at the same time, kill vast numbers of people and destroy vast numbers of habitations; who take the trouble to pull the rotten teeth of some montagnard but think nothing of creating 2 million refugees (few of whom seem to be refugees from VC terror), as long as these refugees constitute a "resource denial" to the VC and are given the privilege of having some more teeth pulled.* Above all,

* In the words of a TIME executive: "To witness the misery of one of the refugee camps is to realize that there is no imaginable way for their inhabitants to be any worse off, not dead or imprisoned, under Ho or Mao. Or even Stalin or Hitler or any of those lesser hells."

Americans think in material terms while the Vietnamese, who have so few material goods, tend to think of their meager goods in a different context. Americans consider it to be of little importance if Vietnamese houses are destroyed or people displaced because "that kind of house one can build again in a couple of weeks"; and whether a person lives in his native village or is forced to another one or even into a refugee camp seems an insignificant matter to Americans who do not exactly practice ancestor worship and who will always move for an extra thousand dollars in salary from the graves of their parents in Tallahassee to a new job in Portland, Maine. Besides, and finally, hearts and minds of people, individuals or groups, are not won just because one sets out to do so and, according to some master plan, inundates people with goods and appeals. In fact, nations never win the hearts and minds of other nations.

7. The "Righteous Cause" Fallacy. Am I to blame if I kill a man in an elaborate but bungled effort to save him from a snake? A Yale psychiatrist (Robert Lifton)

* Individuals sometimes catch the imaginations of others, such as FDR and JFK who were adored in Europe. But they did not try to remake Europe.

who recently returned from Vietnam reports in TransAction (March 1968) that many Americans in Vietnam (to the extent that they do not explain away their malaise simply with being caught up in the system) look upon the slaughter and suffering and shambles all around them with the consolation that their cause is righteous and their country's intent all to the good and in the interest of the Vietnamese people. This is a very delicate issue, but must be part of any effort on our part to think ourselves out of the war after we thought ourselves into it. For if the cause were truly just, we must not falter; but if it is not really just, we not only do not have to go on, but must not go on. An aid to thinking about this sensitive point might be that a cause, in the course of an obstinate effort to serve it, can imperceptibly change from good to half-good to half-bad to bad. Moreover, a cause that cannot succeed can ipso facto not be really a good one. Immanuel Kant said that we only ought to do what we can do; one might say, conversely, that we ought not to do what we cannot do. And as we cannot do in Vietnam what we set out to -- to vanquish the VC without destroying most of the country and its people -- our cause is very much in question. In this connection, a word is also in

order on just what measures a nation is entitled to take in the defense of the cause of its own security, as it perceives it. It is true -- as long as we see in Communism our most mortal threat -- that every Communist on this globe represents a real or potential danger to us. If a mere paper hanger like Hitler could accumulate and use against us the power he did accumulate and use against us, any red Hottentot in the African bush may in fact eventually contribute to our undoing. Are we entitled to kill him? Are we, in fact, entitled to kill VC soldiers, any more than the civilians whose deaths we deplore, just because they are VC? Everybody "worries" about killing Vietnamese civilians, though tending to console himself by saying c'est la guerre. But few worry about killing VC. Yet, the VC, as we know very well, are not stooges of a Red China, out to destroy or weaken us; their sole and independent aim is to remold their own country. If left to themselves they could not care less about us. Are we entitled to kill them? It is true that their victory and a subsequent Communist take-over in Vietnam would weaken and perhaps even endanger our position in the world (in the perhaps antiquated terms in which we judge that position). But what exactly does that mean?

If my neighbor's children have the measles and thus represent a palpable danger to the security of my own, am I entitled to gun them down? What, precisely, is legitimate self-defense against someone who after all threatens me only indirectly? What does the "security" of the United States require, and how many hecatombs may be legitimately sacrificed for it before the quest for that security ceases to be a righteous cause? (This question is particularly important, as we will continue to face it, regardless of the outcome in Vietnam.)

8. The "Coercion" Fallacy. Many years of the most savage pounding by air and ground forces have proven that the Vietnamese, North or South, are simply not coercible. Those in the grip of the "Rainbow Syndrome" will always say: But how about tomorrow? But while -- as said above -- the VC probably can be destroyed, i.e., reduced to a nonfunctioning remaining mass of humanity, that is not coercion. The interviews in RANDs possession give the key to all this: The elements of cohesion in the VC armed forces, and between the armed forces and the population, are such that disintegration seems practically impossible. This in turn enables the VC leaders to resist any efforts to compel them either to do certain

things or to desist from doing other things. (For details, see my RM-5462-ISA/ARPA on the subject.) What we are dealing with here is a mixture of organization, discipline, leadership, a sense of mission, and a whole view of nation, life, and death that has not only enabled the VC to inflict defeat on us in the three rounds we have fought so far, but is likely to enable them to inflict an even more serious defeat on us in a fourth round, unless we practice, in the end, termination by ex-termination.

It might also be well to consider that the VC's always adequate cohesion under the greatest trials may be at least one reason why they receive such enormous amounts of aid from China and the Soviet Union, with, it appears, no questions asked as to where their loyalty lies. For the VC are, contrary to ARVN, people who indeed can be effectively helped because they know how to help themselves. They therefore are, in both Russia's and China's scheme of things, invaluable allies, who are likely to receive ever more aid -- a factor which in turn contributes to their effectiveness and un-coercibility. This should be kept in mind when, in current and future negotiations, the old temptation to coerce them reappears.

9. The "Alternative Strategies" Fallacy. This fallacy is related to the de-escalation fallacy discussed earlier in this paper. It is based on the mistaken assumption that we have the power to obtain our objective not just in one way, but in various ways. But as the aim we set for ourselves -- victory with Pacification -- cannot be attained at all, there are also no alternate strategies for attaining it. What could they be, anyway? More air than ground, more ground than air? More civic than military action, or vice versa? All these considerations run into the old chain of paradoxes: Without winning over the countryside we cannot defeat the VC's armed forces, but without defeating their armed forces we cannot win over the countryside. Without creating a viable government in Saigon we can neither win the countryside nor defeat the VC forces, but in the midst of this war we cannot create a viable and effective government in Saigon. Indeed, if the picture were not so radically black for us as it is, Hanoi and the NLF would not have fought on with such perseverance or taken such losses, nor would China and the USSR have helped them so greatly. To the VC (and Russia and China) the quixotic futility of the American undertaking was clear

from the outset, which also explains the "mystery" why they did not simply fade away in the face of our -- for them -- probably unexpectedly violent response, to wait for another and better day. They apparently judged the chances to be excellent, and Rounds One to Three have proven them right. Who can doubt that the VC and their allies will be braced and prepared better than ever for Round Four? What alternate strategies can there possibly be as long as the objectives remain more or less the same?

A word is in order on the bombing of the North, however. Would it be a genuine strategic option to stop the bombing? The point is that if the bombing were stopped, that could indeed be a step toward ending the war, but it could not bring us nearer to our aims; if we persevered in our aims the VC would merely breathe a sigh of relief over the bombing being stopped* and fight on better than ever. The conclusion is that we have no

* A word here on whether the bombing of the North is effective or not, and on the seeming paradox in the position of those who deny that the bombing is effective and at the same time call for its discontinuation as a first step to peace. Why discontinue it if it is effective? The point is that the bombing is having a great and painful effect on NVN, but that it is not effective in the terms it was meant to be, i.e., to interdict

alternate strategic options and that the VC -- if we continue to make war against them -- cannot but retain the power to force upon us the strategies we must select, as they have in the past. Our aims, plus their capability and strategy, determine our strategy if we pursue the war in whichever form or for whatever purpose; there are no strategy options other than those existing in any war -- attrition, destruction, or checkmating, unless withdrawal is also regarded as a strategy. Of these four, after what the war has so far revealed, only destruction and withdrawal are genuine options, and destruction only if the VC allies hold still, which is far from certain. Ergo -- there are no alternative strategy options, except withdrawal or extermination, the latter option being only theoretically possible, and in every conceivable respect undesirable, impermissible, and, ultimately, disastrous for the United States.

If we have no alternative strategies to reach our past objectives, can we at least increase the number of

infiltration, bring Hanoi to the table, and so on. The principal effect of the bombing, it seems, is (a) a strengthening of Hanoi's resolve, (b) a strengthening of the NVN fighters' resolve in their fight against the Americans in the South and (c) a strengthening of Russia's and China's resolve to help their embattled ally.

strategy options by scaling down or otherwise changing our objectives? Can we, say, "accept" a partition of South Vietnam, or a coalition government including the NLF, or some other "concession" that would still provide us with some payoff for all the blood and cost, and -- perhaps more importantly -- save our face by giving us a chance of having our way after all by insisting on less, but getting at least that? And, if we could agree on a new objective, could we pursue a new strategy toward attaining it? Or could we perhaps even proceed the other way around, and by determining what aim a "favorite" strategy might at best accomplish, pick that aim and settle for it? This, again, is an illusion. The VC and Hanoi have only one aim in this struggle and still have it as the struggle now approaches its fourth round: to get us out of Vietnam in order, then, to instate the NLF in Saigon, and sooner or later to "unify" the country. On this there is no bargaining possible, because it does not represent a "pie" that can be divided. Again, the VC/Hanoi can probably be defeated if (a) termination takes place by ex-termination and (b) the world at large holds still. But as long as they are not defeated they cannot but have as their minimum and maximum aim our

departure from Vietnam -- and they are not likely, nor are the Russians or China likely -- to accept another Geneva settlement that failed, for them. The South of Vietnam is not a pie in the sense that the VC could divide it with us according to some key, as they are fighting against our presence there, per se, and against what we wish to do with that presence, i.e., frustrate their attempt to take over, and instead impose our own favorite system. They do not care whether we try to do that by peaceful means (see "Pacification" Fallacy, above) or by purely military means, and therefore will fight with the same ardor against anything we can try, from taking over the whole of South Vietnam by force, to the most modest enclave system designed to be a base from which to fan out "peaceably" into the countryside. There is no aim that we can pursue by direct interference that is less objectionable to them than any other aim, so that with regard to objectives, as with regard to strategies, the idea of choices is a fallacy. Just because this is a war not for possessions; precisely because we really "don't want anything" in Vietnam; just because this is a political (what they call neo-colonialist) war, it

is a war which writes its own objectives, and condemns the search for alternate objectives to being a fallacy.

10. The "Negotiation" Fallacy. The exposure of the "Alternate Strategies" Fallacy leads us directly into the "Negotiation" Fallacy. With Hanoi and the NLF there is really nothing to negotiate about, at least not in the pursuit of any of our past or even scaled down "objectives" in Vietnam. The thought that there is, is part of the "De-escalation, or Dove," Fallacy. This does not mean -- and the point is of prime importance -- that we might not be able, after unconditionally stopping the bombing of the North, to negotiate with them on orderly withdrawal and an end to the war, at least before the beginning of Round Four of the struggle begins. And it does not mean that Hanoi would not have sat down at the table in the past under any circumstances; in fact everything speaks for it, in view of the major concession Trinh made last year when -- with a for him quite substantial concession -- he agreed that talks would be held if the bombing were stopped. Had the bombing then been stopped the other side would probably have sat down at the table and the Tet offensive might not have taken place -- when it did. It would have turned out very soon, however, that no

agreement could possibly have been reached. If Hanoi had negotiated, it would of course have done so in what we call "bad faith," and nothing could have been accomplished. The call for negotiations, now so popular in many quarters, is in fact a way of playing truant with the problem: As there is no pie to be cut up, there is nothing to negotiate about, at least not as long as our objective is to persist in denying them South Vietnam or part of it. Should the object of negotiations ever change and become termination-by-liquidation, the matter would of course be quite different, and effective negotiations could probably be had, as the VC may not be assumed to have either the power or the will to inflict a Dunkirk on us.

11. The "Vietnam Only" Fallacy. One great and dangerous fallacy beclouding our thinking on Vietnam is that the U.S. is dealing with Vietnam only or mainly. This fallacy is not often expressed in so many words, as everybody acknowledges the part played in the war by other Communist powers; but we act as though we had to do with Vietnam only, which is apparent from the fact alone that we act as though we had all the time in the world to "persevere" there. We have discounted, more or less, that the Chinese might enter the war because they

are, we think, afraid of our bombing which we would probably bring to bear on them this time; and we feel that the Soviet Union is ultimately interested in helping to bring about peace because it is anxious to avoid a confrontation with us. The reader may decide for himself how probable such a course of events is. We would be wiser, it seems, to take the Soviets at face value and listen to what they have to say about the war in Vietnam, and they say nothing reassuring. In any event, a curious transformation has taken place since Rounds One and Two; initially we explained our action in Vietnam by insisting that the NLF was the tool of Hanoi and Hanoi the tool of Peking, and that we were opposing Red China, when in reality we were opposing merely Hanoi/NLF; while now we tend to insist, or at least act as if, we were opposing merely Hanoi/NLF, when in reality we are facing in Vietnam the entire Communist world coming to Hanoi's aid. We are now fighting that de facto coalition in a Vietnam whose North, as one analyst in State's INR well put it, has become virtually one big funnel for foreign weapons and supplies pouring South. And the coalition we are now facing in Vietnam will neither accommodate us on Partition, Coalition, Enclaves, or even De-escalation, nor can

it be expected to be unable to cope with Round Four, if we elect to fight it, even if we enter the ring with a million men -- we can, of course, defy the entire coalition. But then we are involved in a war so different that we can no longer speak about the war in Vietnam; Vietnam would then be merely the trigger to the larger bomb. Of course, we just might be able to coerce that coalition facing us in Vietnam into desisting, maybe yes, maybe no -- but it would be the worst of all possible brinkmanship, with enormous risks stacked against insignificant rewards.

* * *

The Real Choice. It is not surprising that in view of the many fallacies obscuring the issue, the choices that seem to present themselves and are vigorously argued in many quarters are also often spurious.

The first of these unreal choices is that to persevere in Vietnam means to promote peace, to desist to court world war. Only in an age foreseen by George Orwell (to involve him once more) can such a choice be formulated and accepted by millions, when the reality, quite obviously, is precisely the opposite: To persevere is to court war, and to desist to promote peace. The argument that to

desist would be a Munich and that the Communists would be encouraged by our retreat from Vietnam to press on toward great conquests has much less cogency than the argument that, if we persevere, they will feel pushed to the wall and regard us as a most implacable, dangerous and ruthless enemy against whom "a stand has to be made somewhere." That kind of thinking is not our monopoly, after all; it is entirely mutual.* If we persist in Vietnam and win (at the cost of many of our own lives and perhaps another million of Vietnamese lives), the Vietnamese still will never be "pacified," so that even after that "win" we will be able to maintain ourselves or our friends in Vietnam only by permanent great violence; and neither the USSR, nor China, nor any other Southeast Asian nation will ever be reconciled to such perpetual presence cum violence. Besides, our espousal of limited controlled war and flexible response which led to this protracted, very destructive, and quite uncontrollable warfare under the nuclear umbrella, can lead further along the same road and probably would: with the nuclear deterrent against

* Even Ho Chi Minh told a correspondent of Le Monde that he couldn't accept a "Munich"! (Realités, December 1966.)

violence largely eroded, whole world wars with increasingly sinister conventional arms may become a possibility, actually triggered by a "win" in Vietnam. Thus the only real choice for peace would seem to be to opt out of Vietnam, not to smash our way deeper into Southeast Asia with a deluge of shells, napalm, and herbicide.

Next, the choice facing the United States is not between "victory" (good) or "defeat" (bad), or between "can and will win" (optimist) vs. "cannot and will not win" (pessimist), but between "can and will persevere, destroy all of Vietnam, risk larger war" (pessimist) vs. "can definitely afford to withdraw, restore peace, sanity and prosperity" (optimist).

A further aspect of the choice that must be made concerns our allies around the globe. Never has any support for any cause been as lukewarm as that of our "allies" for our endeavors in Vietnam. Only very few give us the staunch support we receive from Southeast Asia's mini-Hawk, Thanat Koman, Thailand's foreign minister. Of course, we do receive some support from Germans of not very savory political leanings, which should be doubtful encouragement. As for the rest, the scene is quite barren. The reason may be that the populations of Europe and other countries are more opposed

to the war than they say.* Perhaps, as the "strongest and richest nation on earth" we can disregard "world public opinion" and instead intone the famous cry: "Fiat justitia, pereat mundus!,"** i.e., justitia in that remote, abstract way we are now seeing it. That would hardly seem wise, however.

The choice before the United States, further, is between prosperity or economic calamity, civil strife or civil reconciliation, confidence between the generations or rebellion. It has been claimed by the President and others that this country is rich enough to fight the war in Vietnam and build a Great Society at the same time. But, aside from the fact that the recent monetary crisis

* When Altiero Spinelli, Director of Italy's Institute of Foreign Affairs, visited RAND in January of 1968, he spoke to me privately, in his capacity as a distant relative, after official business had been concluded. He said: "Are you people totally mad to conduct that atrocious war in Vietnam?" I asked: "How many European intellectuals and politicians you know feel that way?" He replied: "Every one of them." I asked: "Then, why don't they say so? Except for a mild rebuke from de Gaulle every two years, we never hear anything, really." Spinelli said: "Because there is no reasoning with you people, so why should we get into trouble with you? We even approve of the fact that our governments don't oppose you on Vietnam, for that very reason."

** For those who have forgotten their Latin: "Justice must be done, even if the world should perish!" -- Exclamation by some Emperor or other in the Middle Ages.

seems to indicate that this, too, is fallacious, the point is that, even if the country were rich enough in material resources to fight such a two-front war, it would in all likelihood be impossible to proceed in both areas simultaneously, because of the adverse climate inevitably prevailing at home due to the war. Limited emotional, spiritual, and political rather than financial resources seem to preclude a straddling of the hiatus between a very bloody war abroad on the one hand, and constructive and peaceful endeavors at home on the other.

Most importantly, however, the choice before the United States may now be whether it wants to have democracy or a dictatorial police state in the future. In view of the fact that a very large number of Americans never will "buy" this or any other similar "counter-insurgency" war, and be quite aggressive -- in the American tradition -- in expressing their disagreement, the conduct of such a war may require, sooner or later, that the government (whose principal representatives already now can hardly show themselves anywhere in public without precipitating violence) use force to curb dissent. With many other pressures already operating in that direction, caused by our galloping technology,

to opt for continuing the Vietnam adventure may ultimately
be to opt for a police state at home.*

The Honorable and Profitable Solution. In Vietnam, the United States is now faced with a situation which precludes a number of objectives the United States Government considers desirable; there is only a very limited range of maneuver, which the United States, because of past faulty theories and practical miscalculations, has left. If we "get out" we are not "giving up" Vietnam, just as we never "gave up" China; we are not holding much in our hand, and have even less within reach. It is therefore not a question whether we can afford to give up South Vietnam. We really have no such choice.

Unawareness of our very limited room of maneuver leads to the "Of Course We Can't Get Out" Fallacy which is a mistake -- on pure ground of logic -- made by all those doves who want to "de-escalate" in one way or another, but who insist on building at the same time a

*Conversely, one danger may also be that as a result of continuing an ever harsher warfare, the American people become inured to war as a normal instrument of public policy.

Vietnamese paradise, and so on. They say we "can't get out" because of just about any variant of the domino theory, or, more precisely, domino fallacy. But it is not a question, in the face of stark reality, what we would like, or consider, in abstracto, a necessity; to take that as the basis of our considerations is to persist in the very miscalculations that led us into the war in the first place, and, by leading us into it, may have eliminated some of our most cherished options in Southeast Asia and the world -- if ever they were options.

The choice is only whether we want to liquidate the war or continue it, hoping eventually to recoup "everything": our prestige, our position, our political and military theories, our deterrent, our self-esteem, our fantasy of omnipotence. To pursue this objective which now seems beyond reach, we are tempted to begin, without much enthusiasm, the fourth round of what Europeans have sometimes called the "cowardly war against the Vietnamese," all the while seeking an "honorable end" to the conflict.

But where does honor really lie in this conflict? After all, if we desist, the VC, though they have frustrated the attempt on our part to destroy them, have not defeated us in the sense that they have subdued us. When

France was defeated by Hitler, invaded and subdued, it could not live in pride and honor. But, having merely been driven out of Indochina by the Vietminh, it can now live quite well in pride and honor. How much more so would the United States be able to live in pride and honor if, not even suffering the fate of the French in Vietnam, it were to leave of what remains of its own free will, and, while clearly retaining the capability to launch a most devastating but futile fourth round in the struggle, ceased killing Vietnamese "for their own good" while losing its very material and spiritual substance at home in the process? Honor and pride are not only not incompatible with a liquidation of the war; they seem to dictate a liquidation of the war, and a facing up to a post-war situation which, if looked at calmly, need not at all be unfavorable, after all, if only we approached it imaginatively.

In a small staff meeting at RAND, Britain's Enoch Powell, after listening to some staff members cataloging for him all the many things in the world the U.S. had to do, could not do without, and could not possibly tolerate for the sake of U.S. security, finally exclaimed: "What the Devil are you people so afraid of?" He then pointed

out with what great insecurities all others had to live, and how overwhelmingly favorable the U.S. position remained in the world in any event. Anybody who has read of the recent upheavals in the Soviet "orbit," in Poland and Czechoslovakia, cannot but agree with Powell on that count alone.

To exit from Vietnam would be practical, honorable, "hard-nosed" and -- one hardly dares to say it -- moral. It would release and activate American energies, and preclude possible disasters to come if the Pandora's box of the Fourth Round were opened, either purposely by the escalators or -- against their own intentions -- by the de-escalators. Withdrawal would reopen, not foreclose, the possibility of America's leadership of the Free World and quite conceivably also open the door to a genuine detente with the Soviet Union (which is at present out of the question) for the benefit of all concerned.

Of course, even such a choice would require, aside from a most basic decision, some careful preparation and planning; and the "new situation" in Southeast Asia, the redeployment of American and Allied troops and so on would put American diplomatic, political and logistic skills to a severe test. But at least these problems

would be real problems -- i.e., solvable problems. The hard and -- if we only accepted it -- sobering and potentially invigorating fact is that many illusions have already been dispelled: the value of many theories on counterinsurgency warfare, the effectiveness of air power in certain situations, pacification, nation-building, the winning of hearts and minds of an alien nation and, finally, the notion on our part that discredited and mercenary men (like Ky) who live on borrowed time and are essentially authoritarian, can be induced to practice land reform and all other virtues of benign democracy. All that remains is what we call our resolve in fulfilling our commitments; but we are not committed to destroy South and North Vietnam; and resolve, when it transcends all bounds of reason, does not inspire trust, but doubts about the perseverer's sanity and, ultimately, **fear**.

What the consequences of a disengagement would be for the future role of the United States in world politics would of course depend on how the United States would reassess that role. Much would depend on whether the U.S. could bring up to date its view on what Communism actually represents today and what could and should be done about it; its views on containment; its theories on

deterrence, coercion and all the other paraphenalia of limited war and crisis management; and so on. In any case, it can "solve" the Vietnam situation to its advantage only if withdrawal is accompanied by and part of a global effort and a reassessment of its role in the world in the post-Vietnam situation. The answer to America's "problems" in the world of which the war in Vietnam is only one conspicuous and transient manifestation, is not likely to reveal itself in Vietnam. Therefore, continuing study of the Vietnamese situation, no matter how assiduously conducted, can never lead to the finding of the needle that is not buried in the Vietnamese haystack. What is buried there, however, and in fact no longer buried but by now clearly discernible, is that withdrawal from Vietnam is the only sensible, profitable and -- happily -- at the same time also the only "honorable" option before us.